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**ECONOMIZATION OF SPATIAL
PLANNING**

**THE CASE OF POLAND'S SPATIAL
DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT**

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Economization of spatial planning. The case of Poland's Spatial Development Concept

Jacek Zaucha*

Abstract

At the regional (subnational) level spatial planning has remained firm mainly in its land use aspects. Despite of pretty advanced legislation in Poland requiring each self-government region to prepare spatial planning outlines based on regional-socio economic strategies (both of indicative nature) the regional governments have gradually moved (in terms of human resources, interest of regional politicians) from think-tank (strategy making) position to bodies managing structural funds for given territories. More efficient communication of spatial planning messages, making spatial planning concepts better understood by those who shape the space by their routine decisions is only the first step towards combating the so-called stalemate of spatial planning. Despite of being very interdisciplinary spatial planning must become more opened to the co-operation and use the results from different fields of science.

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Economization of spatial planning. The case of Poland's Spatial Development Concept¹

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An added value of cross-sectoral integrative spatial approach (i.e. emphasis on horizontal and vertical integration) in dealing with cultural, socio-economic and ecological challenges seems to be taken too often for granted by spatial planning practitioners and researchers. For instance VASAB² has highlighted this added value in its many policy documents but with little or only narrative proof. The core feature underlined was exceptional ability of spatial planning to balance such diverse demands as those for socio-economic development, nature protection and rising quality of life of the inhabitants (Zaucha 1997,12). In this context the mission and usefulness of spatial planning in pursuing the goal of sustainable development has also frequently been pushed forward. As Damsgaard and Groth (1998, 11) has properly explained this has been because: "(i) planning in territorial context calls for co-ordination of all sector policies relevant to the territory in question, be it a settlement, town, region or nation, (ii) public participation is bound to the citizenship of territories from local communities to regions, countries or nations (iii) subsidiarity is related to the dialogue between various levels in the administrative and political hierarchy corresponding to similar levels of territories". This integrative role of spatial planning seemed to be even reinforced by the move of the European Union in late 90s. towards co-ordination, regulation and conciliation e.g. from market forces to public choice driven processes. In this context spatial planning has been considered as in line with the main objectives of the Treaty on European Union (Zaucha 1997,9) and the process was crowned by introducing the notion of territorial cohesion into the Leipzig Treaty of 2007 (Duhr, Colomb and Nadin 2010, 206).

This "firm" position of transnational spatial planning has started to be eroded in the recent years. Indicators of that can be seen at different planning levels. At European level, despite mainstreaming spatial development into the EU cohesion (structural) policy, the genuine features of spatial approach (cross sectorality, integrative approach) has been undervalued and substituted by demands on concrete even mono-sectoral actions . This has been well described by Duhr and Nadin (2007) although Waterhout and Stead (2007) are more optimistic. The discussion between member states and the EU Commission on the "Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-13 - Transnational Co-operation for the Baltic Sea Region - Programme under European Territorial Co-operation Objective" might serve as an anecdotic example. For the well established in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) transnational territorial co-operation for the years 2007-13 the Commission proposed to change a focus into building sewage treatment plants and transport infrastructure investments despite both requiring little transnational co-operation and limited cross-sectoral approach. By that Commission has made attempt to

¹ Some parts of the Paper were published in „Planning Practice and Research”, vol. 22, nr 3 August 2007.

² Co-operation of Ministers on Spatial Planning and Development ion the Baltic Sea region countries- *Vision and Strategies around the Baltic Sea 2010*

squeeze spatial development into a tool-box of “former objective one” interventions the Commission is deeply familiar with. Preparation of visions strategies and even pre-feasibility studies not speaking about urban networking or urban-rural partnership have been regarded as of limited value for the development of the BSR and hardly prioritised by the Commission at least in financial terms.

Equally gloomy picture (although for different reasons) one can gain monitoring the results of the Leipzig process. The EU Territorial Agenda is deeply rooted in the ESDP paradigm making little help for bridging better growth and structural changes (Lisbon) with local characteristics (of cities, regions) of territorial nature (accessibility, gateway functions etc). By that we might lose an occasion to explain the pro-developmental role of spatial planning to those who will shape the space and its order in the future. As it was pointed out by Gløersen, Lähtenmäki-Smith and Dubois (2007) there is a gap between spatial planning geographical biased analysis and real development of territorial structures influenced among others by role of actors and agents of the territory, their goals, ambitions, and knowledge. The notion of territorial capital is still vague and requires much better explanation and confirmation. More research on why some territories are more successful than the others is necessary to make territorial capital operational and widely applicable in the policy making. Some future oriented issues requiring transnational spatial approach should be better researched and highlighted as well. Among them is planning of the sea space being one of the most promising fields for transnational spatial planning to demonstrate its added value in the future (VASAB 2005, 12-13).

At the regional (subnational) level spatial planning has remained firm mainly in its land use aspects. Despite the pretty advanced legislation in Poland requiring each self-government region (around 2 000 000 people each) to prepare spatial planning outlines based on regional-socio economic strategies (both of indicative nature) the regional governments have gradually moved (in terms of human resources, interest of regional politicians) from think-tank (strategy making) position to bodies managing structural funds for given territories. This task still requires genuine spatial approach but hardly of transnational nature. Therefore one can observe in Poland gradual weakening of interests of Polish regions to participate in transnational projects promising mainly “learning” benefits. Even projects offering preparation of solutions of concrete local and regional issues are losing (in competition for national –co-financing) against the tangible investments in the local or regional infrastructure and MSE support. This threat pointed out several years ago (Zaucha and Szydarowski 2005, 739) nowadays becomes more and more evident. Partially this is due to specific characteristics of Polish system of territorial self-government based on principle of tasks decentralization while centralizing public money in a national budget³. As the consequences Polish regions are in difficult position to mobilize the necessary national co-financing for the EU projects versus local and national governments and they have to heavily prioritize on that. The consequence might be their pushing out from transnational projects by the regions from more affluent or more decentralized (in financial terms) countries. This might be even accelerated due to diminished (for the period of 2007-13) difference in co-financing rates required from the old and new EU member states. As the result the “Europeanization ” (shared norms, rules and approaches – for the better explanation of the concept see Waterhout 2007; Duhr, Colomb and Nadin 2010, 359-373) of Polish spatial planning might slowdown at least at subnational level.

³ The budget of the 250 000 city of Gdynia is much bigger than the budget of Pomerania region ten times larger in the population terms.

All these pointed above raise the question on the reasons of the “spatial planning stalemate” at least in the transnational context (this seems to be a wider European feeling as pointed out by Duhr and Nadin (2007)). The exponential growth in co-operation on spatial development issues across national borders indicated by Duhr and Nadin (2007) should not serve as an excuse to postpone such a question since motivation to participate in such projects could be very different including also opportunistic attempts to secure funding (see Colomb 2007; Gløersen, Lähtenmäki-Smith and Dubois 2007). Therefore it is not clear to what extent such growth was purely money driven (availability of external co-financing) and to what extent the transnational and cross-border projects (mainly IIIA but also some III B projects) were in line with genuine spatial approach. The findings of the Commin project (researching on BSR good practices out of INTERREG III B projects in chosen themes) create rather mixed feelings. Pretty large number of the projects has not been able to report their results few years after the project completion (Zaucha 2007a). The reasons were multi-faceted, from changing the staff responsible for project execution up till lost of interest in the issues addressed by the projects. Therefore instead of looking on the number of the projects one should rather try to grasp the intensity of the policy transfer (or rather effects of learning process on policy outcomes i.e. identifiable policy impacts) as pointed out by Colomb (2007).

Colomb (2007) comes to the conclusions that the one of the main added value of the transnational co-operation is a learning process (see also Böhme 2005; Gløersen, Lähtenmäki-Smith and Dubois 2007). This observation is also applicable to Polish circumstances since Polish partners most frequently reported as benefits out of INTERREG III B projects the improved information background on EU policies and issues, extended communication network, establishment of common trust and permanent partnership with foreign partners, exchange of experience and less frequently solving common development problems (Zaucha Szydarowski 2005,).

The notion of learning process on policy outcomes is mostly applicable to the situation described by Duhr and Nadin (2007) and by Colomb (2007) as projects based on common issues, but it can also have some relevance for projects dealing with transnational issues although in the latter case the solving of concrete common problems might appear at the top of the learning process. However, it is also evident that identification of genuine transnational issues requiring transnational solutions is a challenge (ESPON, 2006). Such systematic attempts dome so far (e.g. VASAB 2001) are fare from being internally consistent. This even reinforces an importance of the learning process as a successful factor for transnational spatial co-operation.

Colomb (2007) and Duhr and Nadin(2007) propose a lot of interesting explanations why in practice the depth of learning appears to be relatively shallow (Duhr Nadin 2007) and why therefore the changes in policies, administrative routines, legislation, and planning paradigm have been so rare. Colomb (2007) has concentrated on weaknesses of the official monitoring and evaluation approach used by the EU Commission and INTERREG structures as one of the main reasons for that. The currently used evaluation scheme is not suitable to grasp the nature of the learning process (inability to grasp the qualitative changes, isolate causal effects attributable to EU funding, encompass institutional and governance impacts and difficulties in measuring framework for interactions in new generation of regional innovation and cluster policies etc) and therefore can hardly highlight why and when such learning is successful. Colomb (2007) is right in telling (after Batterbury 2006) that “the current evaluation framework thus fails to address the main question of why things work (or not) in specific contexts”. Whereas Duhr and Nadin concentrate (2007) in the factors negatively influencing transnational co-operation as perceived by the participants of the projects themselves. Among them the most important are: fear of competition (leading to selection of less competitive

themes for transnational co-operation such as culture or tourism), long term nature of spatial development offering results mainly in a long run, more trust in cross-border co-operation, different institutional arrangements for spatial planning in different countries, lack of capacity in regional and local governments to engage independently into transnational projects, lack of interest of many important partners (rail airports telecommunication providers) to co-operate on spatial planning basis, and least but not least requirements of the funding programs i.e. bias towards physical concrete outcomes and lack of trust in learning and networking results. Similar arguments have been given by Carriere and Farthing (2007) who in addition to that has pointed out the fluid nature of important spatial planning concepts requiring further operationalisation.

Zonneveld and Stead (2007) have even given an example of a cases when project leaders switched from abstract concepts (e.g. urban-rural partnership) to more problem oriented ones such as access to service or “open space” in order to make the project more understandable. Many projects have done their own reinterpretation of the abstract concept e.g. polycentricity (Gløersen, Lähteenmäki-Smith and Dubois 2007) whereas some others referred to ESDP notions only verbally. This made ESDP pretty successful in terms of conformance but much less in terms of its performance or implementation by INTERREG projects (Waterhout, Stead 2007). As a conclusion Duhr and Nadin (2007) point out that the nature and scale of transnational spatial development is perceived “as more abstract, distant from the routine pressure of every day government and much more difficult to influence through policy action”. The same gap between abstract concepts of European spatial planners and concepts used by practitioners at regional and local level is pointed out by Waterhout and Stead (2007). One can interpret all those findings as a prevailing feeling among decision makers that the learning on ESDP related concepts and ideas (which are synonymous for transnational spatial concepts) within the INTERREG projects might have a limited practical usefulness for the local and regional governments in performing their statutory tasks.

However, all those explanations although reasonable and well justified tend to overlook one more important shortcoming of spatial planning practice at least in the transnational context. It seems that whereas spatial planning has managed in a quite successful way to establish itself in the minds of decision makers as a useful way of protecting, restricting, balancing, identifying conflicts and preventing them it has failed to make the same associations with notion of socio-economic development, economic transformation or innovation fostering. Even notion of clusters despite having clear territorial dimension has been rather shifted from spatial to industrial or economic policies.

Of course an important part of that problem is covered by the weaknesses of the learning processes described above, in particular difficulties with its proper evaluation and measurement. But equally important are communication shortcomings. There have been only few attempts (see Zaucha 2007a) to systematically collect and widely distribute success stories out of the INTERREG projects. In the Baltic Rim there are only two well known cases of evaluation of the benefits out of transnational territorial co-operation done by the public authorities engaged in this process (BBR 2007, Szydarowski 2001). But even the quoted above reports seem to be too scientific and less policy (message) oriented. The result is that many important BSR projects evidently preparing socio-economic development, i.e. demonstrating how investments can be attracted by spatial planning (e.g. VBNDZ, South Baltic Arc), how to improve dialogue with sector stakeholders on spatial issues (e.g. South Baltic arc), how to use local niches and specific potentials to enhance development of the small and medium size cities (e.g. MECIBS) or how to better use specific BSR potentials through integrated spatial planning (e.g. Baltcoast) have been recognized only by narrow group of spatial planning professionals mainly from the participating regions. A blueprint

how to make spatial planning pro active has been also offered by SuPortNet project which tested a tool of voluntary agreements between authorities responsible for nature conservation and sea space users. But even this attempt has not been properly disseminated.

The lack of evaluation unfortunately is coupled with lack of responsibility to maintain the project results after the project closure. Neither Interreg IIIB structures nor national governments standing behind the INTERREG co-operation have perceived a need to do so. If rather conventional ways of results dissemination by the projects themselves are added to that picture (mainly seminars, flyers, brochures and web-sites with rare exceptions of more proactive forms such as public campaigns or targeted efforts to reach and inform concrete stakeholders or decision-makers) one can easily understand why spatial planning has not managed to forward properly its pro-development message so far. Despite the fact that Baltic Sea Region (BSR) is privileged in comparison to the other regions by having installed a political network of spatial planning ministers (VASAB 2010) in addition to the INTERREG III B one this advantage has been used insufficiently for bringing the policy relevant results of the INTERREG III B up to the policy level. Of course such lifting up of the results has happened informally by the personal contacts (also at the VASAB meetings) but there has been only limited formal attempt (in terms of human resources) to close the circle from policy to implementation and back to policy making level. One of the reasons might be that VASAB has been limited only to the national level (national policies) which is only a part of the learning process. Another reason can be that VASAB lacks legal status and autonomy at the transnational level (VASAB is a voluntary co-operation) while such status and autonomy have been indicated by Duhr and Nadin (2007) as important preconditions for strengthening transitional co-operation on spatial development issues. Therefore, the BSR lesson is that existence of the political transnational structures is important but not sufficient precondition of the rescaling of the agenda for spatial planning from the regional and national to the transnational scale.

However, the promising feature of the BSR is an effort of an INTERREG III B structures to strengthen the effectiveness and the probability of the learning process within the INTERREG projects. This was done (as if answering Colomb worries) by introduction of some indicators enhancing learning as a such (measuring quality and persistence of the networks, prompting for legislation changes). Such indicators used in ex post reporting system have proved not to be sufficient therefore they will be introduced in the new programming period at the level of application and its evaluation. Although this system is unable to grasp the success factors and preconditions for mobilization of social and political actors it indicates what type of mechanism for maintaining of the learning results would be desirable. Comparing to the SAUL approach (Colomb 2007) this system although much less accurate is simpler and applicable at the Programme level.

More efficient communication of spatial planning messages, making spatial planning concepts better understood by those who shape the space by their routine decisions is only the first step towards combating the so-called stalemate of spatial planning. The lesson from all papers presented in this issue is straightforward. Despite of being very interdisciplinary spatial planning must become more opened to the co-operation and use the results from different fields of science. One might interpret that Gløersen, Lähteenmäki-Smith Dubois (2007) and Colomb (2007) call to pay more attention to the issues so far reserved for political, administrative or sociological and even psychological research (factors for successful learning process or political aspects of polycentrism). In this economics choir in particular new economic geography (Fujita Masahisa, Paul Krugman, Anthony J. Venables 2000; Fujita Masahisa, Thisse Jacques Francois 2002; Baldwin Richard, Rikard Forslid, Philippe Martin, Gianmarco Ottaviano, Frederic Robert-Nicoud 2003) analyzing spatial implications of

cumulative developmental processes should not been overlooked (Zaucha 2007). Bridging not only sectoral policies but also different fields of research seems a future for spatial domain.

This message has been properly digested by national spatial level in Poland. The policy has been recently reshaped in order to ensure a better fit between territorial and socio-economic aspects of development. The Long Term Development Strategy of Poland will have two equally important parts: the socio-economic and the territorial one. Out of the different dimensions of Territorial Cohesion (Zaucha 2011), the focus has been placed in Poland on co-operation, networking and functionality. Polish conceptualization of territorial cohesion is based on such categories as: accessibility standards to territorially specific public services, networking of endogenous potentials (in the dynamic context), as well as the development and further extension of functional areas around growth centers. In that context, a territorially coherent area of a country or region would appear as a network of mutually linked functional areas of varied spatial ranges to offer citizens access to workplaces and public services indispensable for development and preservation of social and human capital (Szlachta, Zaucha 2010).

This conceptualization can be clearly seen in the recently elaborated Polish Spatial Development Concept⁴. Territorial cohesion plays an important guiding role in all six strategic goals for the spatial development of Poland but mainly in (i) the strengthening of territorial cohesion, (ii) the increase in competitiveness of major Polish urban centres in European space, (iii) the preservation of high environmental quality, protection of water and forest resources and (iv) the achievement of rational and orderly spatial development.

Several territorial vehicles, specifically dedicated to the implementation of territorial cohesion form the core of the Concept. The most important are following:

- a) Polycentric metropolis – network of Polish metropolitan regions formed by the largest urban nodes of the country thanks to ensuring more efficient functional connections between them
- b) Formation of the functional regions around the largest cities and also around regional capitals (up to the county level) through joint planning beyond administrative borders, integration of labor markets and improved accessibility
- c) Network of ecological corridors both on land and on the sea (green and blue corridors) joining the most important habitats and diminishing fragmentation of the Polish space

The most interesting of them seems to be the concept of polycentric metropolis. It emphasizes the importance of concentrated development, driven by cooperation between urban nodes instead of development spreading along the transport corridors/development zones. It also accentuates the importance of better use of the existing endogenous potentials and their activation through networking. It helps to maintain the polycentric structure of the Polish territory while resolving the conflict between polycentricity at the European and the national level. Shortening the distances between large cities will facilitate the development of metropolitan functions, diminish internal migration flows and decrease primacy of Warsaw in the urban hierarchy. Therefore it serves both cohesion and competitiveness purposes. Moreover, it is also environmental friendly (less conflicts with nature conservation due to spatial concentration of development in space) and is in line with the idea of a knowledge-

⁴ The governmental document is still under elaboration so some quotations come from the preceding expert draft of the Polish Spatial Development Concept (Korcelli et al. 2010)

based economy. In European space Poland might become a bridging territory between Pentagon⁵ and innovative driven Scandinavia.

Other concepts important for the implementation of territorial cohesion still need further investigation. This is the case e.g. for accessibility standards to public services of general interest, which should be territory specific, e.g. take into consideration different features/characteristics of the Polish space. This issue was highlighted in the document as an important task to be solved in the action program for implementing the Polish Spatial Development Concept.

The Polish Spatial Development Concept will also have a strong implementation part in line with the TERRITORIAL COHESION idea of integrative policy making. The Concept will integrate different policies affecting the same territory, it will provide spatial policy with an appropriate monitoring and evaluation system and in the long run it will become the main part of the Long Term Development Strategy of Poland – the key policy document of the country.

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